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ABSTRACT

Sixty-four undergraduate teacher education majors enrolled at the University of Illinois were subjects in this study to determine the effect of various types of student stimuli on teacher response quality as measured by a five point scale for the measurement of empathic understanding developed by Carkhuff. More specifically, the study investigated whether teachers responded more or less empathically to students who were expressing either anger, depression, or joy. In addition student stimuli varied in the type of situation presented to the teacher by the student. Comparisons in quality of response were made between teachers who received training in empathic understanding and those who received no such training. Interactions among the independent variables were considered. It was concluded that happiness received the most empathy and anger the least. (Author/JMF)

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THE EFFECT OF VARIOUS STUDENT PROBLEMS AND EMOTIONS ON TEACHER RESPONSE QUALITY

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Submitted June 8, 1976

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The purpose of this investigation was to determine the effect of various types of student stimuli on teacher response quality as measured by a 5 point scale for the measurement of empathic understanding developed by Carkhuff. More specifically this study investigated whether teachers responded more or less empathically to students who were expressing either anger, depression or joy. In addition student stimuli also varied in the type of situation presented to the teacher by the student. Comparisons in quality of response were also made between teachers who received training in empathic understanding and those who received no such training. Interactions among the independent variables were also considered.

METHOD

Sixty-four undergraduate teacher education majors enrolled at the University of Illinois were subjects in this study. Thirty-five of these subjects were enrolled in section A of an undergraduate general educational psychology course. These subjects were presented with 15 different audio stimuli to which they were to respond in writing, as if they were the teacher of the student presenting the problem. The twenty-nine other subjects employed in this investigation were students enrolled in section B of the same undergraduate educational psychology course. These subjects were also asked to respond in writing to the same 15 audio stimuli presented to the students in section A. However, these students received training in facilitative listening prior to the administration of the stimuli. The training was conducted during three consecutive one hour class periods. Material was presented explaining the importance of accurate understanding for teachers and the Carkhuff scale for the measurement

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of the communication of empathic understanding. Trainees then practiced responding to written student statements and discussed their responses in terms of a 5 point rating scale.

The 15 audio stimuli were presented via a cassette tape recorder. The voices on the tape were those of actresses ages 10 and 12. The order the stimuli were recorded on the tape was determined using a table of random numbers. All responses were rated according to Carkhuff's Five Point Scale for the measurement of Empathic Understanding (1969, p. 174). An advanced doctoral student with extensive experience in both training and rating was used to rate the teacher responses. Each stimuli, approximately three sentences in length, presented a situation with an accompanying emotion. In five of the stimuli the emotion presented was anger, in another five depression, and in the reamining five the emotion was joy. The statements which were presented also varied as to the nature of the situation in which the experience occured. Stimuli were divided into 5 groups with 3 stimuli in each. In each group the emotion experienced was caused by the same type of situation. Group I involved situations in which the students were referring to the teachers behavior itself. The student might be upset about a grade given to her by the teacher, excited about being a science fair finalist, or might angrily accuse the teacher of handling a discipline problem improperly. These three of the fifteen stimuli were teacher related. A second group of stimuli involved situations in which the student was referring to her peers. In these three stimuli the student was either excited about her relationship with one of her peers, or angered or hurt by peer behavior. A third group of stimuli referred to situations which were controlled by the school administration. In these three situations students expressed emotions concerning a cancelled student-teacher basketball game, a new bus route, or an unacceptable lunch room situation. A fourth group of

stimuli referred to situations which occurred at home. In these three situations the students expressed their feelings concerning an up and coming vacation, a punishment issued by her parents, and an accident involving her dog. Finally, the fifth group of stimuli did not refer to any situation. The student could not identify the cause of her feeling of joy, depression or anger but rather just expressed global sensations of these feelings. These five groups were labeled according to whom the situation related and thus were labeled: teacher, peer, administration, home, and self.

Campbell (1963, p. 25) labels an experiment of this sort a Post-Test Only Control Group Design. The design of this study is a 5 x 3 x 2 analysis of variance, in which a replication factor was employed. The main effects were the emotion expressed, the situation which caused the emotion, and whether or not training was received prior to testing. The dependent variable was the empathic understanding of the teacher, as rated on a 5 point scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that teachers were significantly more empathic when students expressed happiness, than when students expressed the emotions of depression or anger. Teachers were least empathic with students who were expressing anger. Tukeys Multiple Comparison Method, which was used to make pair wise comparisons, demonstrated that all these comparisons were significant at the .01 level. Perhaps the reason for this difference is that teachers feel least defensive when a student is expressing happiness and are therefore able to be more empathic. Similarly students who are angry stimulate defensive reactions in teachers and therefore receive less empathic responses.

Table 1

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY EMOTION (FACTOR A)

Group	Means	N
Anger	1.631	320
Depression	1.826	320
Happiness	1.942	320

Table 2

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY SITUATION (FACTOR B)

Group	Means	N
Self	1.815	192
Home	1.867	192
Administration	1.672	192
Peer	1.825	192
Teacher	1.820	192

Table 3

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY TRAINING (FACTOR C)

Group	Means	N
Untrained	1.642	525
Trained	1.989	435

Table 2 shows that the nature of the situation which causes the emotion influences the quality of the teacher response. Teachers were most empathic toward home related situations and least empathic toward situations in which the school administration was in control. Tukeys method of pair wise comparisons demonstrated that the difference between these two means was significant at the .01 level. The quality of teacher response to teacher related and peer related situations was also significantly higher (.05 level) than response to situations which were related to the school administration. A possible explanation as to why teachers were able to deal least well with problems related to the school administration should be offered. It is proposed that teachers feel frustrated by problems that are controlled by the administration since when a response is demanded they do not have the control over the situation to resolve it.

There was a significant difference between the response quality of trained and untrained teachers. Although the difference is significant, it is still minimal. Both groups are operating substantially below a minimumly facilitative level. Although the training seems to have been effective, long term results can not be guaranteed.

The interaction between the emotion factor and the situation factor is illustrated in Table 4. The means represent the fifteen individual stimuli to which the teachers responded. Four of the fifteen stimuli received mean ratings above the 2.0 level. These categories were: joy-self, joy-peer, joy-teacher, depression-home. Teachers were able to deal least well with the categories of depression-self, anger-home, anger-administration, and anger-teacher. The difference between any of these categories and any of the quality categories is significant at the .01 level as determined by Tukeys Multiple Comparison Method. Although these differences are interesting to note, differences can not with certainty be

Table 4

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY EMOTION AND SITUATION (AxB)

	Anger	Depression	Joy
Self	1.718	1.570	2.156
Home	1.601	2.218	1.781
Administration	1.547	1.757	1.710
Peer	1.687	1.742	2.046
Teacher	1.601	1.843	2.015

attributed to the factors since the individual characteristics of the stimuli confound the results.

The interaction between the training factor and the emotion factor is illustrated in Table 5. A significant F was not obtained. However Tukeys Multiple Comparison Method was employed to compare various pairs of means. Significant differences at the .01 level were obtained between trained and untrained teachers on the variables of anger, depression, and happiness. Thus training improved teacher functioning in response to all three emotions. At the completion of training, teachers responded in a significantly ($p<.05$) more facilitative manner to depressed and happy stimuli than to angry stimuli. Thus, although training improved teacher response to all 3 types of stimuli, angry students still received the least facilitative responses from the teachers.

The interaction between the situation factor and the training factor is illustrated in Table 6. The analysis of variance demonstrated significant results and Tukeys Multiple Comparison Method was employed to make specific comparisons. It indicated that trained teachers performed significantly better ($p<.01$) than untrained teachers in four of the five situational caetgories. Only in the situational category "teacher" was no significant improvement due to training demonstrated. The most marked improvement was in response to administrative problems. Untrained teachers responded in a significantly less ($p<.05$) facilitative manner to administration-related problems than to any other problem type, while trained teachers responded equally as well to all problem situations. It is impossible to pinpoint the cause of this improvement from this research, however, one might speculate improvement due to the initial low-level of functioning as well as the lack of responsibility teachers accept for school-related problems. Similarly, the lack of

Table 5

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY EMOTION AND TRAINING (AxC)

	Anger	Depression	Happiness
Untrained	1.457	1.648	1.822
Trained	1.341	2.041	2.086

Table 6

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY SITUATION AND TRAINING (BxC)

	Untrained	Trained
Self	1.680	1.977
Home	1.685	2.086
Administration	1.395	2.005
Peers	1.685	1.994
Teacher	1.766	1.885

improvement in the teacher-related situations might be attributable to the initial high level of functioning as well as the high degree of responsibility teachers accept for their own behavior.

Second order interactions were also considered and the results are presented in Table 7. The results are significant at the .05 level. The means distinguish between the responses of the trained and untrained teachers to the 15 individual stimuli. Not one of the 30 means presented is at or above 3.0 which is generally accepted as the level of a minimally facilitative response.

SUMMARY

This research indicates that student emotion is a factor which influences teacher response quality. One possible explanation for the differences is the degree of threat an emotion causes. Of the three emotions considered happiness is the least threatening and also received the most facilitative responses. Anger is a very threatening emotion, since it is an emotion which is usually directed at someone, and consequently teachers were able to deal with it least well. Future research might explore the effect of other emotions on teacher response quality as well as the effect the intensity an emotion has upon a responder. This research found certain situations to be a factor in facilitating or inhibiting teacher response quality. Untrained teachers were rated lowest in response to administrative problems while trained teachers were rated lowest in response to teacher-related problems. Future research might explore alternate situational categories and the effect training has on each. Training was minimally successful. It significantly improved teacher response quality in all areas, but the improvement was not as great as desired. Future research efforts might provide different results if a more extended training problem was employed. In general research of this type

Table 7

MEAN RATINGS OF ACCURATE EMPATHY BY EMOTION, SITUATION AND TRAINING (AxBxC)

	Anger		Depression		Joy	
Self	1.500	1.982	1.514	1.637	2.028	2.310
Home	1.514	1.706	1.928	2.560	1.614	1.982
Administration	1.157	2.017	1.557	2.000	1.471	2.000
Peer	1.485	1.931	1.514	2.017	2.057	2.034
Teacher	1.623	1.568	1.728	1.982	1.942	2.103

Table 8

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY TABLE FOR ACCURATE EMPATHY RATINGS

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Emotion (A)	15.80	2	7.90	17.985	0.000
Situations (B)	4.26	4	1.06	2.494	0.043
Training (C)	28.61	1	28.61	25.874	0.000
AxB	20.87	8	2.60	7.183	0.000
AxC	.83	2	.41	.945	0.391
BxC	6.12	4	1.53	3.578	0.007
AxBxC	6.80	8	.85	2.578	0.017
Error	68.55	62	1.10		

should prove helpful in structuring training programs for teachers by highlighting possible problem areas.

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